

An Empty Glass

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“More water, sir?”

Startled at the voice, he looked up and saw the waiter looming over dutifully with a dripping pitcher of water. He nodded and watched the ice rise to the brim of the glass. Filled, once again, he thought emptily. The glass was filled, but still empty; the water gained could not replace the water lost.

The waiter disappeared without him noticing. He continued to stare straight ahead at the strategically placed entrance. He ignored the empty chair before him. He was distant, absorbed in his mind. He became lost in the memories, the sound of her voice in the morning, groggy and sweet, but he couldn't think of that. That was the past.

As slow as a cat's yawn, the second hand on the clock above the door moved. The noise, inaudible to the average patron, became louder and louder to him. The noise crept into his thoughts and caused him to remember her unpunctuality.

As if waking him from a dream, the bell sounded, signaling her arrival. She crossed the floor without urgency and filled the naked chair. She spoke first.

“The omelet looks nice,” she said, glancing at the daily specials listed on the black board.

“Sure it does.”

“I haven't had one in a while.”

“I know. So,” he drew a breath. “How is it?” he asked.

“It's fine. I'm fine,” she said.

A silence spread like butter on whole-wheat toast. It melted into the crevices and sensing the uneasiness, she spoke again.

“How's Corine?”

“She misses you,” he started and began to raise his voice with impatience. “She asks every day when her ‘mama’ is coming home. Do you know how hard it is for her?”

“I had to go. She needs to understand,” she said flatly.

“It was the wrong time. She's in the kindergarten play. Did you know that?”

"That's great, but you know I won't be able to see it." She looked down at the white tablecloth and began tracing circles with her fingers.

He watched her fingers move and thought how he wished to hold her hand again, but again, that was the past.

"You could—" he started.

"I can't," she stated firmly. Her words were stale, unmovable, though his wobbled on jelly.

"You missed her first loose tooth. I had to play tooth fairy. When I crept to her bedside, I stepped onto her xylophone—the one your mother gave her—and created such a noise that her eyes began to open and she groggily asked how the tooth fairy could be a man. She didn't remember it the next day. You could have been there," he stared at her hard and craned his neck to get a better look. Unaffected by his words, she was still looking down with apathy, tracing methodically.

He continued, "You didn't see her learn to ride a bike. I had to buy two boxes of those Dora Band-Aids and we had to open nearly every Band-Aid because you know how she only likes to wear the ones with the monkey." He paused. "We flew a kite the other day,"

She looked up.

"We flew a kite," he repeated.

"Oh."

"There was the right amount of wind. Corine took hold of the handle and ran as fast as she could. I could barely keep up with her. She was doing it for her mom to see, she said. She knew how much you loved to fly the kite. You always said you wanted to be free."

She was looking down at the tablecloth again.

"She was doing it for you. Don't you ever miss her? Don't you ever miss us? I miss the days when we could laugh about anything. We could laugh about omelets!"

"I still like omelets," she said calmly.

"No, you don't." His voice was slipping on syrup and dripping onto the table. "You don't care and you didn't care."

"I could not care. I couldn't keep living like this..." Her

mouth was agape with her palms up toward the speckled ceiling. She continued, "Do you remember how hard it was for me? Do you remember after she was born? Do you remember my frustration you couldn't understand? You couldn't hear my thoughts and I'm glad you couldn't." Her words were stale alphabet Cheerios falling into an empty bowl, hitting the sides with a rattle.

Emptiness. She was empty, and so was he.

He closed his eyes and leaned back in his chair.

"More water, sir?"

He opened his eyes to his drained water glass. It was bare except for the two lingering ice cubes frozen together.

"Are you waiting for someone?" the waiter asked and motioned to the lifeless chair.

"Oh, no. Sorry, it's only me," he replied wearily. "Thank you."

He opened his wallet for a bill for the waiter and saw picture of Corine and her innocence, her lively, green eyes. How she looked like her mother. He looked to the speckled ceiling, wondering. Perhaps she was watching them now. She cared. She had smiled and laughed, but once emptiness replaced fullness she couldn't be completely filled again.